December 11,1987

Dear Jane,

It's really hard to know where to start. So much has happened this year and I can't really remember what I've already told you and what might still be news. So here goes.

On October 2nd I was diagnosed with AIDS due to esophageal candidiasis. I had been experiencing a progressive difficulty in swallowing and esophageal pain (even when not eating) for a month prior to running some tests. When the barium swallow was negative for a mass, we did an esopagoscopy which revealed the candida infection. It was no shock. I had been deteriorating for months--a lot of diarrhea, fevers, night sweats, and weight loss secondary to difficulty eating. But the most telling symptom was profound fatigue. It was all I could do to make it through a day's work.

For a week I kept the diagnosis to myself. All along I had been covering up at work, pretending that nothing was wrong. I really didn't know what to do. The whole situation was complicated by severe problems on the job which had made me hate going to work even when I felt OK. So when I got diagnosed, it seemed like a way of escaping work and a life that had become miserable. I'm sure that my depression over problems at work had contributed toward my physical problems and even escalated my deterioration. At that point I just wanted to get a quick case of PCP, refuse treatment and die quietly in my apartment.

But then came the March On Washington For Lesbian & Gay Rights. I had been planning all year to go to Washington for the march and decided that no illness nor anything else would keep me from the March. When my boss began to talk like she couldn't spare me the time off, I said, "I'm going to Washington if I have to craw over broken glass to get there. The last 15 years of my life have been spent in preparation for this and I'm going to Washington if it means giving up my job!"

That was one of the best decisions that I ever made. Though Ann was in Ireland at the time, Scott and I stayed at her place. That was another stroke of

good fortune. As you may know, Scott does counseling of newly diagnosed PWA's. Perfect for me. Scott and I had a long session one night in which he helped me sort out a lot of fear, anger, and frustration. He advised me to declare myself a PWA, and go on disability. He pointed out that the stress of work, especially when one is hiding poor health, is especially hard on the immune system. He told me to imagine what it would be like to not have to roll out of bed at 6AM after a night of fevers and sweats, what it would be like to be able to take a nap in the middle of the afternoon. It all made sense to me and as soon as I got back to California I followed his advice.

The six days of demonstrations and activity in Washington were exhilarating. The sense of unity, solidarity, and dedication to our cause was overpowering. No matter when I was in the city during those six days, the presence of lesbians and gay men was obvious every where. The night before the mass march, Dupont Circle became a giant outdoor lesbian/gay party. Restaurants were packed to overflowing. Spntaneous chants, cheers, and singing were commonplace.

The morning of the great parade/march, Scott and I went to the metro for a ride to the elipse. At eight o'clock in the morning the trains were packed with a very jubilant crowd. As the doors opened up, Scott stepped on the car and asked loudly, "Are there any gay people on this train?" And the whole train cheered! It was so nice to see the heterosexuals at 10% on the metro.

The quilt was gut-wrenching. Words cannot describe the beauty, and uniqueness of each of the 2600 patches that made up the massive memorial that covered an area equivalent to two football fields. After the reading of the names as each section was unfolded, visitors were allowed to pass along the canvass walkways to view each section up close. It was like being in a cathedral. The mood was somber and very reverent. Nothing could be heard but the sound of shuffling feet and weeping as total strangers held, hugged, and comforted one another. And our lesbian sisters were there in equal numbers, supporting their brothers. It was our first public and massive display of grief and it was so bad-

ly needed. It was also very cleansing.

The parade had over 200,000 and took four hours to pass by. There were 500,000 on the mall by the time that Jesse Jackson addressed the crowd. That's the largest gay gathering in the history of the world, and the largest civil rights demonstration in more than 20 years. What a day! What a day!

I spent the following day in training for civil disobedience. Then on Tuesday, October 13, 1987 we made history again. I am proud to tell you that I was among the 840 protestors who were arrested on the steps of the supreme court. That's the largest number of people ever arrested at the court. The action was extremely were planned and coordinated. We were organized into waves, each wave being made up of affinity groups. Each affinity group was made up of people who planned to place themselves at risk for arrest and others who acted as support persons. They stood by and observed the arrests, took pictures, got officers names. They also held bail money, and carried out instructions on who to call (family, employer, etc. if anyone didn't get out when planned).

Another 3-4000 people stood across the street and provided support by chanting, cheering and singing. "Gay Rights! Now!", "Shame, Shame, Shame!", "The Whole World Is Watching!", "We are gay and lesbian people, and we're singing, singing for our lives!" Every time the police cleared the steps another wave of faggots and dykes took their place. I never felt such a sense of exhilaration charging a position in Vietnam as I felt when my affinity group charged across that street to the police barracades. (In Vietnam there was no cheering squad!)

We stood nose-to-nose with helmeted, riot-gear equipped police officers, their billy clubs at the ready, while we sang and tossed handfuls of little paper pink triangles into the air. We were treated very well by the police, who in many cases let it be known that they were supportive of our cause. In one incident a protestor mounted the steps carrying a large American flag whipping in the breeze. As he struggled to fold it prior to sitting down on the forbidden steps, a police officer took the loose end of the flag and the two of

them folded the flag together in the traditional triangular form--to the wild cheers of the crowd. Believe me, there were a few tears at that moment.

My affinity group was a marvelous group of men and women. Though we had only met the day before during the training, we felt like family. We stayed together until our last member was released from jail, about 8:30 PM. Then we all went out to dinner. I was the only PWA in my group of about 15, and they looked out for me with great concern--making sure I was warm enough, that I got my medication on time, that the group didn't walk too fast for me. Once again, I was overwhelmed! What a day! What a day!

And what a handsome group of men and women they were. It was so thrilling to see so many young folks who were so eloquent on the issues and so dedicated to the cause. I would have been pleased to have any of them represent the gay/lesbian population as a spokesperson. During our training session on the day before the action at the supreme court, we were going around the group with each person giving a 3-minute talk on his/her experience, reasons for wanting to participate in civil disobedience, and whatever else seemed appropriate. The last guy in the circle, who identified himself as 23 years old and only "out" for a year, started off his remarks by saying, "Wow! I feel like I'm in a roomful of giants!" The events of the next 36 hours proved that he was right.

Back in California everyone has said that I appeared visibly changed, transformed in some way. I did not return to work even for one day, and everyone has been very understanding and supportive. Instead, I have busied myself with the founding of the Lesbian/Gay Archives of San Diego. That has been a pet project on the back burners of my mind for several years. Now, there seems a renewed sense of urgency. If I'm ever going to get it done, it must be now. Further, I want some stable organization to leave my movement memorabilia, books, and videos to when I pass on whether it's next year or next century. I'd also like to leave a legacy that will benefit my community long after I'm gone.

I took over 300 pictures in Washington and have arranged them in a slide show which I have set to music. Everyone who has seen it has raved and I've had more requests to show it than I've been able to honor so far.

On November 4th I went to see my urologist to investigate a progressive tenderness in my left (and last) testicle. Both palpation and an echogram indicated the presence of a tumor. The next day we went to surgery--another orchiectomy. And again it was seminoma. Shit!

That was a tougher blow than the AIDS diagnosis. You know how emotionally attached we men have become to our balls. So now I don't have any at all. Every time you hear someone say, "No balls!" think of me. Actually I have one more than I used to have. This time I had the surgeon put in two prosthetic testes. So I have more balance than I've had for a long time. It's not that anyone is likely to see my scrotum these days, but I like it better with something in it.

After a superficial inguinal wound infection, I have progressed pretty well in the post-operative period. It's been slower than in 1975 but I guess that was to be expected. We caught this tumor much earlier than the last one because I recognized the symptoms earlier. All CAT scans and blood tests for tumor markers have been negative. I am not a candidate for radiation therapy because I maxed out on that 12 years ago, and it would be devoustating in the presence of my other disease anyhow. I have refused chemotherapy and no one is pushing me on that. WE are hoping that I was cured by the surgeon, and will do semiannual CAT scans for early detection of growth in my abdomen or pelvis.

Upon my return from Washington I made the decision to stop giving myself die messages. I committed myself to living with AIDS rather than dying with AIDS. I am thankful for whatever wellbeing I have each day and I do not spent a lot of time thinking about what the future might bring. I think I have a healthy balance between a realistic acceptance of my condition and a sense of hope. I can hope without getting lost in denial. None of that has changed as a result of the seminoma. Damn the testicles! Full speed ahead!

I've joined a group called "San Diego ACT UP" (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power). We have already put the City Council on notice that we intend to be "Silent No More". We plan to do a bit of hell raising if it becomes necessary.

Can you see why I haven't had a chance to write since I received your card in September? I think about you often and wonder how things a going in London. I hope you are finding time to do some traveling. I hope you are not too lonely. Do you live alone ? I'd really like to know and hope that you can find some time to correspond.

Though this letter carries some somber news, I hope that it also carries the very upbeat feeling that I have been experiencing since I decided to make some personal decisions that favor me. I'm doing fine and I'm very much at peace. May your holidays be as peaceful.

My love to you,

Jess